

Truman Capote and *The Grass Harp*



Truman Capote in 1980
Photo by Jack Mitchell

Truman Capote

Truman Capote was one of the most famous and controversial 20th Century American writers; he was famous for both his books and for his flamboyant personality. He is particularly well known for his novella *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (the basis for the 1961 Audrey Hepburn film) and his "nonfiction novel" *In Cold Blood*. *Breakfast at Tiffany's* tells the story of Holly Golightly, a naïve, eccentric society girl. *In Cold Blood* tells the shocking story of a number of a real multiple murder in a small Kansas town, and was based on Capote's conversations with local townspeople and his journey retracing the killer's escape route. Both books were immensely successful, earning the author millions of dollars in royalties. After a period of writer's block, Capote started writing *Answered Prayers*, a book "revealing the regrets of his rich and famous friends," but he died before completing it.

The Grass Harp

The Grass Harp was published 7 years before *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and 15 years before *In Cold Blood*. According to the author, the novella holds a special place amongst his works: "None of my work is autobiographical; except, in an obscure way, in a way that even I cannot define, my second novel, *The Grass Harp*. It was written to commemorate my affections for two beloved friends, long dead, who appear in the book as Miss Dolly Talbo and Catherine Creek.¹"

¹ As quoted in *Capote, Truman, 1924-1984*. (2006). Retrieved July 2, 2013, from ProQuest Biographies: http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_id=xri:pqlit-US&rft_dat=xri:pqlit:reference:bio2992

Discussion questions

1. Which character changed the most in *The Grass Harp*? Which one *learned* the most?
2. This story tended to focus more on the *interactions* between characters than on the actual plot. Which interactions stood out to you? Which ones did you like?
3. Did the story's plot go as you expected? Were there twists you weren't expecting?
4. What did you think of the judge's character? What would you have thought of the story if Dolly accepted the judge's marriage proposal?
5. Did you want more plot while reading this story? More description?
6. How did you feel about the ending of the story? Was Dolly's death necessary?
7. What did you think of the metaphor of the grass harp?

Further reading

More by Truman Capote:

Breakfast at Tiffany's / Truman Capote. New York : Modern Library, 1994. 161 pages. ISBN 9780679600855.

The complete stories of Truman Capote / introduction by Reynolds Price. New York : Random House, 2004. 300 pages. ISBN 9780679643104.

In cold blood : a true account of a multiple murder and its consequences / Truman Capote. New York : Random House, 1965. 343 pages.

Similar books:

Watch with me : and six other stories of the yet-remembered Ptolemy Proudfoot and his wife, Miss Minnie, nee Quinch / Wendell Berry. New York : Pantheon Books, 1994. 210 pages. ISBN 0679434690.

Stories, essays & memoirs / Eudora Welty. New York : Library of America : 1998. 976 pages. ISBN 1883011558.